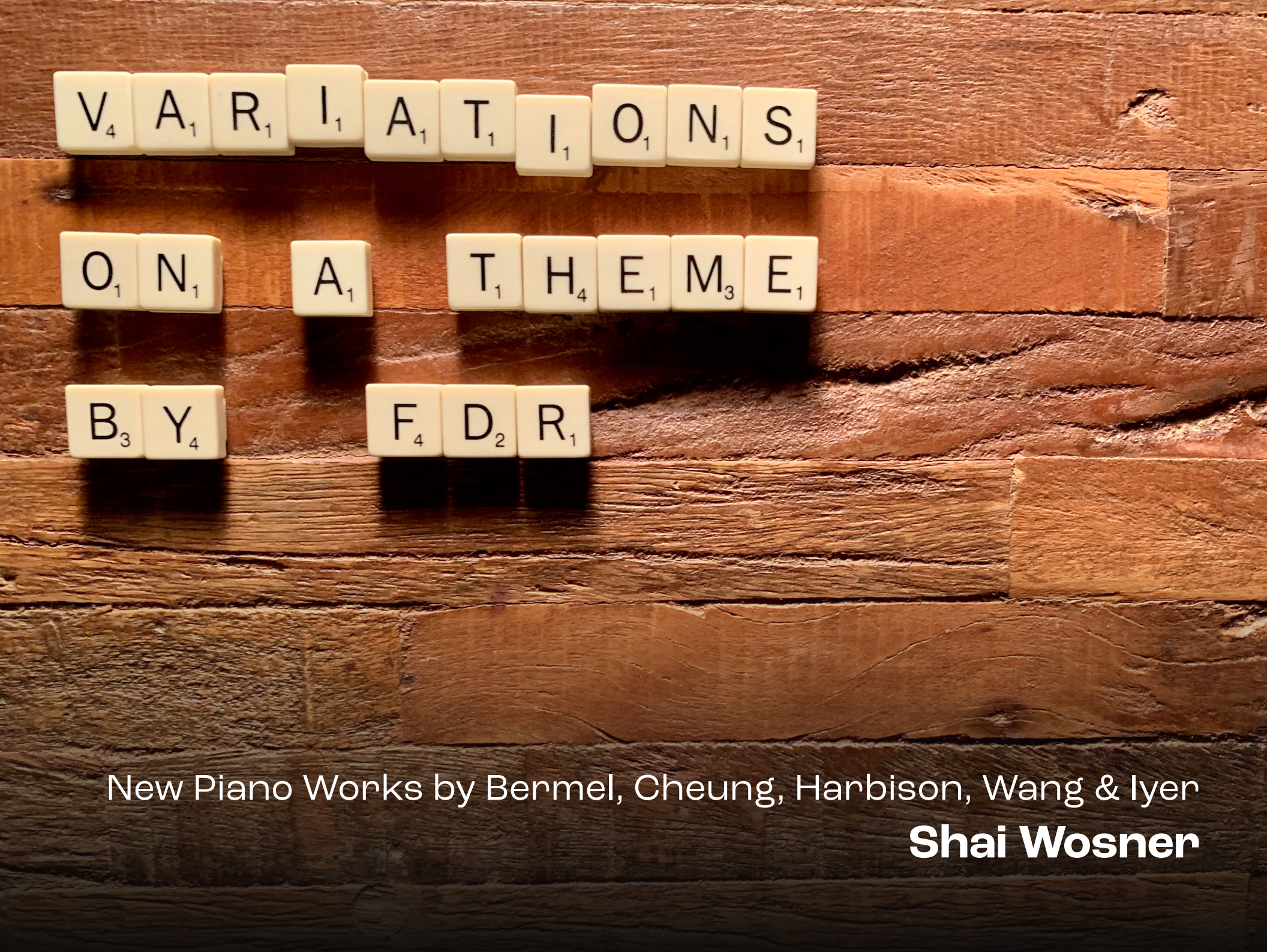

New Piano Works by Bermel, Cheung, Harbison, Wang & Iyer

Shai Wosner

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY FDR

Shai Wosner, *piano*

	Derek Bermel	
1	**Pequenas Memórias (Small Memories)**	5:46
	Anthony Cheung	
2	**Bitter Seas**	6:44
	John Harbison	
3	**Passage**	4:01
	Wang Lu	
4	**Lacuna**	7:02
	Vijay Iyer	
5	**Plinth (for Kwame Ture)**	7:45

Total Time: 31:16

“...remember, remember always, that all of us... are descendants of immigrants and revolutionists.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt, address to The Daughters of the American Revolution, 1938

Pequenas Memórias

"Pequenas Memórias" (in Portuguese, or "Small Memories" in English) is a tribute to my wife, Andreia Pinto Correia, who was born in Lisbon. It is also the title of a memoir by the great writer José Saramago, which describes his youth in Portugal.

The large part of this work was written in Brooklyn during the first six weeks of the coronavirus pandemic, when the sound of ambulance sirens howled outside day and night. It was a period of intense psychic bonding; we were spending 24 hours a day together, each day waking up and reading about the hundreds of deaths in the city, occasionally learning about a friend or colleague stricken with the devastating virus. During this dark and intimate period, I meditated on Andreia's own complex journey as an immigrant in the U.S. She arrived as a student, studying jazz saxophone, but her dreams were soon dashed as the result of an accident that required multiple surgeries and months of inpatient rehabilitation at hospitals. Her performing days behind her, she reemerged into music as a composer, first in jazz and then in concert music, transformed but retaining the seed of her original musical inspiration. So America has been for her a place of hopes and ambitions destroyed and reimagined, of trauma and creative rebirth. This piece begins with a simple tune that quickly turns restless and introspective. The chromatic descending bass— a trope from Bach (and before) through Chopin, Ellington, and the Beatles (to name just a few of my favorites)— emerges throughout the work as the theme is transformed and renewed.

— Derek Bermel

Bitter Seas

This piece is a short homage to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, the South Korean-born and San Francisco-raised artist and writer whose work explored themes of cultural memory, trauma, and erasure, and whose murder in 1982 at the age of 31 cut short a voice that was just starting to gain exposure. The title is in reference to her 1976 piece in which an American flag is stamped with the word "Amer," playing on the multiple meanings of the word: in French, it translates to "bitter," and "a mer" as "to the sea." These multi-lingual references and cultural conflations and confusions show up frequently themes in Cha's work, especially in *Dictée,* published just before her death. Family history intersects with political events and becomes infused with mythical and historical figures from the distant past, influenced by film techniques of fragmentation like montage and single frames. These thematic and technical approaches, as well as the layers of cultural and political meaning that become nested within the immigrant's loss of voice and identity, form the impetus for this work.

— Anthony Cheung

Passage

In responding to Shai Wosner's intriguing idea, I immediately thought of Vladimir Dukelsky. Soon after arriving in the United States in 1921, as an established composer of concert music in Russia, Dukelsky began absorbing the American pop and jazz idiom. He was befriended and supported by Gershwin, who suggested a name change: to Vernon Duke. Success soon followed, earning him the envious scorn of Stravinsky, who resented his countryman's financial success, and referred to him in conversation as "VD".

In 2004 I had the good fortune to be housed by the Santa Fe Festival in the residence of one of their board members, Kay McCracken, Vernon Duke's widow. By coincidence I had already scheduled a concert of Duke's wonderful pop tunes for that summer's ("April in Paris", "Autumn in New York", "I can't get started") and I was anxious to consult my host about repertoire.

One of her missions was the promotion of Dukelsky's concert music, and on each transit to my lodgings she brought attention to, and proffered a score of one of the sonatas, quartets or chamber pieces. These encounters were frequent: the guest house was reachable only through her bedroom. She rose late, but was always ready with another recommendation. The Dukelsky-Duke transition forms the narrative of "Passage".

— John Harbison

Lacuna

The extensive range of Chinese American architect I.M. Pei's work exemplifies the ultimate amalgamation of tradition and modernist abstraction. Inspired by Pei's work, my piece explores both abstraction and tradition by employing stark registral and timbral depth on the piano with punctuated elements and presenting a continuous lyricism throughout.

— Wang Lu

Plinth (for Kwame Ture)

Plinth (for Kwame Ture) celebrates the life and activism of Kwame Ture (born Stokely Carmichael, 1941-1998), an immigrant from Trinidad to the U.S. who became a fierce champion for civil rights. With his robust critique, tireless organizing, and visionary transnational scope, Ture challenged the idea of the well-behaved, assimilated immigrant, instead committing himself to the cause of equal rights for all. This piece does not narrate his life, but aims to offer an occasion to contemplate his legacy, as a pedestal displays and gives support to a sculpture.

— Vijay Iyer

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